

Mobility as an Adaptation Response in Isiolo County, Kenya: Gendering the Debate

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Research Questions

- *To what extent are patterns of mobility gendered amongst pastoral communities?*
- *Are these changing in response to climate variability, especially water scarcity, and commoditisation?*
- *How far do these reflect an adaptation response?*



Framing Mobility

State/Development Discourse

- Physical or spatial movement
- A reflection of poverty/marginalisation

- Cattle/livestock seen as an asset, a form of capital, to be used for subsistence
- A deficit or lack of skills

- A homogenous construction of people on the move – often seen as ‘footloose’ – and all the derogatory connotations it carries



Pastoralist Understandings

- A way of life – spatial movement signposts a social landscape: building and transforming social networks and symbolic meanings
- Herds and humans part of a common moral universe - jointly reproduced through marriage and exchange
- Ability ‘to move things his/her way’ – managing everyday herding and husbandry decisions, especially seasonal cycles of dry and wet, scarcity and plenty (Brock-Due, 1999:51).
- Differentiated roles and perspectives based on ways of accessing material and cultural resources – gender, generation, class relations

The Context: Borana Pastoralists in Isiolo County

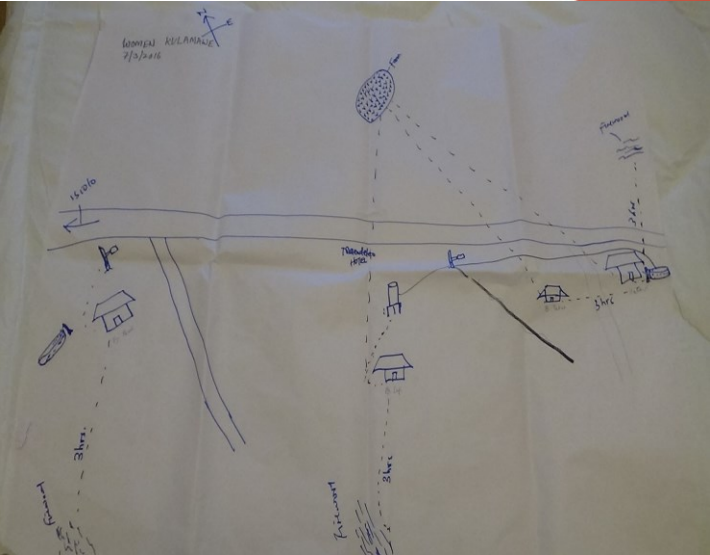
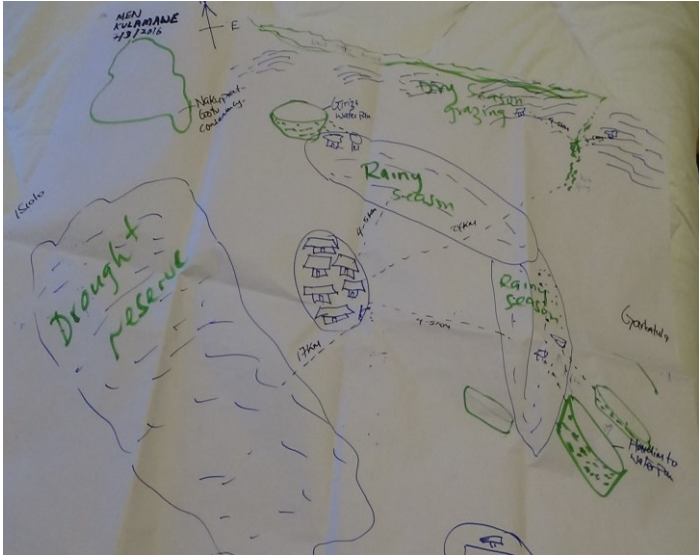
A rural settlement

- A large settlement (700-750), mainly Muslim – only two boreholes
- Surrounded by semi-arid rangeland
- 60-80% households own some livestock, others build herds, the main marker of wealth, through working as herders
- Men manage livestock and women engaged in a range of petty trade including sale of camel milk
- Recent revival of traditional rangeland governance systems (dedha)

A peri-urban, sedentary settlement

- A formal settlement (600) with electricity, water and sanitation infrastructure.
- Gender roles differentiated by age:
- Older Women engaged in farming by the Isiolo River and trade in goats, vegetables and miraa, while younger women engaged in a range of casual work including domestic/sex work.
- Older men with herds often polygynous and spent time away from the settlement, those without spent most of their time chewing miraa.
- Younger men confronted by unemployment - 'hustling'.

Gendered Mobility Patterns (the rural context)



Interpreting the Mobility Maps

Understanding gender roles and relations

- Male mobility shaped by season, the availability of water and competition for water resources
- Recurrent drought since 2002 – use of drought reserves close to the settlement – and boreholes in village for watering herds
- Marriage critically changes male mobility:
 - Married men divide their time between their herds and families in the settlement;
 - Retain social power by claiming to support women's ventures, in the face of threats to their own mobility.
- Women appear to stay in the village, managing children and domestic work
- When herds close by, go to collect milk. Women control milk sales.
- Range of businesses – food, miraa, clothes – often travel far to get stocks – spatial movement changing due to conflict.
- Wage work as part of famine relief programmes – would be socially demeaning for men.
- Season affects wellbeing – dry season involves higher prices for vegetables, waiting/travelling more for water, decline in milk production.

Moving for Water

Fetching water a major task: waiting in queues, walking distances – varies with season.



Sedentarisation, Commoditisation and Gender

Insights from a peri-urban settlement

- ❖ Breakdown of reciprocal gender relations
- ❖ Men unable to play 'provider' roles
 - ❖ Younger men 'hustling' to earn money (especially for bride-price payments)
 - ❖ Older men, authority challenged, seeking political roles in the absence of herds/livelihood contributions
- ❖ Women household managers and providers
 - ❖ Older women engaged in farming, trading,
 - ❖ Younger women in casual work, often 'risky'; marriage more unstable, several of them divorce
- ❖ Narratives of poverty and hunger:
 - ❖ Not enough to eat during floods
 - ❖ No choice for women but to work
- ❖ Delayed marriages and increasing divorce:
 - ❖ Lack of money and assets leads to bachelorhood
 - ❖ Unemployment, inability to support families
 - ❖ Cheating, lying and manipulation
- ❖ Changing Aspirations
 - ❖ Education and salaried jobs
 - ❖ From control over money to financial autonomy
 - ❖ Negotiations over livestock, food and services

Methodological Issues

Whose adaptation are we talking about?

- Need to pay attention to gender, ethnicity, age, locale and histories – adopt an intersectional and historical perspective
- Estimations of wealth, poverty and mobility are relational, subjective and disputed constructions, so not looking for 'one truth', but important to understand alternate constructions.

	Rural Context	Peri-urban
Older men		
Younger men		
Older women		
Younger women		

Concluding Remarks

- Adaptation to what? Emergent transformations linked not just to droughts & climate variability, but to:
 - State policies - the setting up of territorial and political boundaries (conservancies limit grazing and water resources), educational systems and the aspirations and values they generate..
 - New markets – specialised dairying and beef ranching – loss of control and increasing social inequities/inequalities. Women’s entitlements in particular are reduced.
- Ecosystem management closely linked to the management and maintenance of social relations:
 - Family and social networks, especially linked to marriage (polygyny and kinship), ensured mechanisms for support and redistribution of resources and surplus production, breaking down
- Adaptation failures:
 - Dependence on relief measures, engaging with sex work, breakdown of marriage, rising bachelorhood
 - People struggling to survive - loss of habitat and social networks, lead to loss of social identity
 - Burden shifts to women, wellbeing costs (less balanced diets/nutritional stress)

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